

# **34<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary Message 2015**

**Dr. the Hon W. Baldwin Spencer,  
Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, Antigua and Barbuda**

**1 November 2015**

My Fellow Citizens and Residents:

Every year, the Independence Celebration evokes a mixture of emotions, including pride in our country and the achievements of its people; occasionally, a little disappointment at how far we still have to go; and, sometimes, even a feeling of despair as we contemplate the ever-shifting international benchmarks we have to struggle to meet.

But the overwhelming feeling continues to be pride at the fact that we are still here, still surviving, still reaching for the next rung of the ladder, which is proof of our collective ambition and optimism in spite of our realities. It is a measure of our faith not only in The Divine, but in the future we could shape for ourselves.

Nonetheless, for many Antiguan and Barbudans, objectively speaking, this 34th year has been quite a difficult one, characterised by unemployment, under-employment, unkept or broken promises, and an unflattering international spotlight with negative local repercussions. Hence, too many Antiguan and Barbudan citizens are facing the 35th year of Independence feeling disenfranchised, disenchanted, and disempowered. And this is not good.

It would be all too simple and sentimental to say, "Next year will be better." Rather, I will say, "Let us try with all our might and will to make it better." Note that I have said "our." The collective pronoun was used because we need to realise that Antigua & Barbuda is one state, headed by a government that has a responsibility to all. Not half; not some; not one party's supporters but not the next. Hence, there can be no true social progress, or real economic development, if only some of our people are afforded opportunities, while others are left to languish in the dust of history, as one erstwhile developer infamously said.

That is why I am pained by the nakedly political overtones of this year's Independence theme, and the partisan colours in which it paints what ought to be – and IS – a national celebration. We have a nation that has been in the process of being built over these past 34 years – and, I daresay, for hundreds of years before that. Accordingly, it is more than a slight – it is a slap – to discredit all those who have worked to bring us to this point, simply because some of the builders and framers of the past 10 years were not of this administration's choosing.

Nation-building is the responsibility of us all, and, therefore, I take this opportunity to urge the government to begin thinking inclusively and to find ways to engage all of our citizens and residents; and, likewise, I exhort the people not to allow themselves to be side-lined from the governance process, either. When we speak about climate change, we absolutely must include changing the political climate, as well.

Despite the unfortunate theme, the citizens of Antigua & Barbuda, and all those who have chosen to make this country their home, must use this Independence celebration to reflect on where we have been, where we are, and where we have yet to go. We must also reflect on how we will get from here to there as we navigate the waters of globalism, with its values and cultures that are so alien to our own.

Bringing our young people – our future – into the discussion, we must find ways to adapt, and to prosper, without losing those things that make us, essentially, Antiguan and Barbudan; that distinguish us from the others; that mark us as authentic and as original as Sir Vivian Richards and King Court.

Our size is not a deterrent. It is the heart and the will of the people that count; and I know I can count on those qualities to emerge – or re-emerge – and define our journey into the 35th year of our political Independence.

On behalf of the United Progressive Party, which I represent proudly, owing to the place it has carved in the annals of our political history, I wish the people of this great nation a Happy Independence and God's richest blessings to see us into the future.